

sion of the government. They cut in pieces the obnoxious calf skin, and tortured and beheaded one of the ex-magistrates who was accused of treachery to the popular *regime*. They even went the length of professing their allegiance to Charles' arch enemy, Francis I. Francis preferred, however, to negotiate with Charles, and negotiations having put an end to hostilities, Charles was at last free, in 1540, to take vengeance on the rebellious city. He passed through France, and entered Ghent on the 14th February, in the midst of a gorgeous retinue, and a splendid escort of lancers, halberdiers, and musketeers. Resistance was hopeless, and Ghent, after petitioning for the observances of its privileges, was forced to sue for mercy. Charles showed mercy of a kind. He did not, as the ferocious Alva advised, destroy the city. He contented himself with sending the ringleaders to the block for high treason, and in the course of a theatrical scene, which displayed all his splendour and power, allowed himself to be persuaded by the intercession of the regent to grant pardon to the representatives of the rebellious city, who appeared before him clad in penitential garments, and some of the more obnoxious of whom he compelled to beg it on their knees, with halters round their necks. But he made them pay dearly in fines and confiscated privileges, if not in blood. The decree of the 29th April annulled all the city's charters, confiscated all its property and revenues, directed the great Roland to be torn from its belfry, stipulated the payment of the subsidy, and inflicted a heavy fine in addition, reduced the number of the gilds from fifty-five to twenty-one, and deprived them of self-government, and placed the nomination of the magistrates in the hands of the sovereign. Thus, at one blow, the liberties and rights of centuries were annihilated, and in their annihilation the other cities were taught that, if ancient municipal rights were respected, it was only in virtue of their subservience to the sovereign's will.

Charles' rule was autocratic enough, but it was not without its redeeming traits. It respected usage and privilege as far as was compatible with a strong central government. It made considerable progress in the work of fusing into unity a number of provinces too weak separately to stand against the empire on the one hand, and France on the other. Out of the